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THE BASIS OF CRITICISM.

We have, in a previous article, asserted that "every man is so far a critic, and possessed of a taste for Art as to be able to appreciate a fine reproduction of a thing which, in the original he loved, *and no further*." This truth may be taken as an index to the value of all criticism of Art.

Yet there must be a distinction made between the criticism which has as its object the correct appreciation and proper enjoyment of works of Art, and that which aims at the education of popular taste and the direction of artistic effort. The means by which an artist has arrived at his results, are of little consequence to the mere lover of Art—the question with him is simply, if they are worthy, and justly expressed. The Artist, to him, is merely the interpreter of Nature, and if his version of her wonders or beauties is a true one, he has no further care in the matter, the difficulty of attaining such version being of no importance to him. It is the end, not the means, which interests him. To this man, the knowledge of Nature and the ability to see her are alone necessary.

When, however, one undertakes to estimate the power or worth of the artist in himself, and so comes to study Art proper, and especially if he be a professed critic, the case is widely different. Then it is not only necessary to know *what* the artist should represent, but *how* it may be most readily and adequately represented—in short, to understand the technique and processes of Art. If the Critic does not understand the difficulty of accomplishing certain things, how is he to estimate properly the efforts of the Artist who accomplishes them—how can he appreciate the energy and earnestness employed, unless he also knows the obstacles to be overcome? The critic who has once sat down to draw from the human figure, will see how hard a thing it is to become what is called a good draughtsman, and will be less likely than before to condemn harshly the imperfections he sees. "A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind;" and when we have ourselves struggled despairingly through the mysteries of proportion and foreshortening, we shall treat more kindly the shortcomings of our peers.

The case is, we think, clear, that no man

is competent to become a critic until he has first attained that knowledge of, and love for, Nature which would make him heartily sympathize with a work of Art, and that experience of the education of the Artist in the mechanical and merely intellectual elements of his profession, which shall inform him, of every step gone over, how great was the power which was required to take it successfully. These requirements are the BASIS OF CRITICISM.

To illustrate our position let us suppose that a man who has never studied sunlight out of doors, should pass judgment on the quality of its representation in a picture. Never having noticed that the shadows the sun leaves are blue, comparatively, he will be pretty certain to condemn the blueness if it is truly rendered, thus making the merit of the picture the cause of dispraise. Perhaps so palpable a case is not common, but similar ones are constantly occurring in that criticism which is not placed on the true basis. Critics quarrel with anatomical drawing, for the representation of absolute facts, and they condemn the Artist for not doing things which a single lesson in the practice of drawing would have shown them were impossible of attainment.

Every man who has run through the galleries of Europe imagines that he is capable of judging his contemporary artists, at least, and so we have a plethora of half-fledged social and newspaper critics, who, with their senseless babbling and scribbling, cloud public judgment and confuse public feeling. If the public will only learn that no man is fit to be a critic who is not fit to be an artist also, and who has not in some degree an artistic training, they will save themselves much blindness.

It may not be necessary that the critic should be a thorough artist, though even this we are slow to admit, since to appreciate *all* that the artist does, he must have gone over the same grounds himself; but just in the degree that he has attained to practical knowledge of Art will be his ability to criticise *intelligently*. There is a common superstition that an artist is never a good critic—if there could be a rule, we should state it as directly the reverse—viz., that none but an artist can be a critic; and certain it is that, so far as our personal knowledge goes, artists

make the most liberal and intelligent comments on works of Art. It is not to be supposed that they are beyond personal feeling, but *are any other men more free from it?* They are sometimes bitter in speaking of the works of other artists, but rarely without reason; and oftentimes they disparage works really excellent, but with the motive of which they have no sympathy; but we believe it to be true that in any given work of Art, an artist will find more beauties than any other man; and this *is the true test of the ability of the critic*.

The truth is, that a great Critic is the rarest thing in life—the Phoenix of a century of centuries—and a perfect critic a thing impossible. To be this, one must have all science, or how can he understand the justice of representation; must know all forms of Art, else how can he judge if a work conform to its principles; have sympathy with all kinds of feeling, for not sympathizing with an artist, how can he look on his labors with an earnest eye? The CRITIC must be naturalist, philosopher, painter, sculptor, and poet. It is not enough to know all *principles* of Art, but it is necessary to comprehend, also, all applications of those principles. When such an one comes, the world will wake to something new.

Yet from this let us not infer that no man must attempt to pass judgment on picture or statue. Every man has some range of feeling and knowledge in which he may move—in which he loves everything and understands everything—and he is worthy to be a critic who knows this range and does not over-pass it. And this thing always remember, that though Knowledge is power, Love lies at the root of Knowledge; and the admission that one does not love a thing, is also an admission of incapacity to criticise it. He who has the widest love and the highest knowledge, has the broadest basis for criticism.

DRESS.

To speak of dress is to introduce a frivolous subject of conversation. It is quite beneath the dignity of an immortal soul to be busied about such a matter. We can pass hours before the glass, or under the hands of the barber and the coiffeur very profitably, but, though we may condescend